Mansar. The Discovery of Praveesvara and Pravarapura, Temple and Residence of the Vakataka King Pravarasena II
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NAGPUR-440001
Mansar Excavations 1998-2004: The Discovery of Pravarapur

Jagat Pati Joshi and A. K. Sharma

Introduction

Mansar, a small town on National Highway No. 7 lies between 21°24'N and 79°17'E, 40 Km North-East of Nagpur in Ramtek tehsil of Nagpur district in Maharashtra. It is one of the eight sacred places around Ramtek. The site is 1 Km to the east of present village. The site is being excavated under the aegis of Bodhisatva Nagarjun Smarak Sanstha Va Anusandhan Kendra, Nagpur since 1998, under licence from Archaeological Survey of India. Such a large scale excavation and simultaneous conservation could be possible due to very active interest and support by Arya Nagarjun Surai Sasai, President of Bodhisatia Nagarjun Smarak Santha Va Anusandhan Kendra and Director General Archaeological Survey of India.

Physical features and geology

Situated at an elevation of about 285 meters above sea level, its relief features are characterized, by residual hill ranges of the Satpudas and their detached members enclosing on the southern side, undulating vast-black soil valley. Much of the topography is typically one of the Deccan trap having flat-topped and terraced features, low buttressed sides and isolated knolls. The country is well wooded having open glades alternating with patches of forests and clearings for cultivation.

The geological sequence observed at Manasar

<table>
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Archaeans
The rock types include biotite-gneiss, quartz-pyroxene gneiss, calciphyra, crystalline lime-stone, quartzite, mica-schist, hematite schist, pegmatites and various manganiferous rocks known as Gondite (named after aboriginal tribes 'Gonds') is composed of quartz and manganese Garnet 'spessarite'. Various types of quartzite in the Archaean formations and some of the sandstones of the Kamathi stage which are now being quarried for making mill-stones and Garnets are found in abundance in the Archaean garnetiferous mica schist.

The occurrence of 'Gupta' type bricks and ruins of what was assumed to be a Buddhist monastery, were first noted in P.W.D. note 112 of 1906 and then in Nagpur Gazetteer, 1908, which mentions that "the village has a fine tank after which the village is called 'Manisar' or the 'Jewel Tank'. Pilgrims come here to bath in the tank. The village is over hung by low hills, the southern slopes of which are strewn with brick bats, while here and there the foundation of brick wall crop up through the surface. Parts of the old walls have been excavated and the bricks taken for building houses in the village. At the eastern end of the hills, on level ground near the corner of the tank, is a great mound, the lower part of which appears to be composed of solid brick work. It has all the appearance of the stump of a Buddhist-Stupa. Around the base of the mound bricks have been dug out which appear to have belonged to the broad walls of massive buildings. The bricks measured 17.5 by 9.5 by 3" and are cemented with mud. No images or stone-carvings are to be found except one broken figure, which the people believe to be that of the female demon "Hidimba".

In the Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, New series, vol XXIX, 1933, T.A. Wellsted in his article "Notes on the Vakatakas of the Central Provinces and Berar, and their country, 4th to 8th century A.D." writes, in 1928, "a certain amount of interesting material came to light and led to the examination of the whole area surrounding Mansar tank, with the result that the traces of an extensive town-site were discovered."

The extreme limits of the occupation were roughly 2 miles from east to west and 1½ miles from north to south, and whilst large part must have been thinly settled, the evidence of close settlement to the east, south-east and south of the tank is sufficient to indicate a town of some size.

During the course of investigations a number of carved stone fragments were found on the surface on the hill slopes to the south of the lake (some of these are now in Nagpur Museum). These are assignable to the early centuries of the Christian era. Most of the original layout of the site is now difficult to trace, particularly in the eastern portion traversed by the railway from which ballast has been quarried for many years and when investigations started almost all traces have gone, thanks to villagers, ballast work and erosion.

In the middle section of the area (monastery site and Hill B (Hidimba Tekdi), much more remains are available. Hill B was apparently overbuilt with temples and all surface finds of sculptures have come from there. The stone used is a fine-grained aluminum sand stone, easy to work and permitting a fine finish.

A notable feature of the town is the mile long stone facing of the Mansar tank, dry built of large boulders and stone slabs, reaching its greatest development at the monastery site. At the eastern end of the tank, nearly 11 acres in extent, in the centre
is a large mound nearly 40 feet high. A close examination reveals traces of a rectangular building measuring 150 Ft x 85 Ft. It is possibly therefore to be the remains of a Vihara or even of a secular building with surrounding courts. It obviously covered a group of buildings of great importance.

The site is so situated that it receives no drainage from outside, soil erosion thus playing a very small part in the silting of the courts, which must be due largely to the debris from the buildings. The inner court of nearly 3 acres is silted to a depth of at least 5 ft and the outer court of over 7 acres to a depth of about 3 ft. The width of walls varies from 1.5 to 4.5 ft and judging from the excavation made by the villagers, wall heights of 11 or 12 ft including foundations still remain. Bricks used measure 17" x 9" x 3" but are not strictly uniform.

It was the uncovering and destruction of the peculiar construction of a brick lined depression exposed in cutting at the Mansar manganese mine that led to a careful examination. The centre of the depression was occupied by a complex of earthen pots, horse bones, charred wood, and earth. The following objects were recovered from the complex.

1. A fragment of porous brick (?) flat on one side and rounded on the other; size 4½" x 2½" x 1½".
2. A dark-red stone implement, smooth and unpolished, with semi-circular razor like edges; size 1¼" x 1½" x ½".
3. A light-red stone implement, smooth and polished, with blunt-edges; size 5" x 2½" x ¾".
4. A circular stone grinder, dia, 9", thickness 3" with depression in the centre.
5. A fine textured triangular brick, light brick-red; height of triangle 5½", base 4½".
6. A terracotta human figure of, 2½" in height.
7. A copper ring in the form of three ringed spiral.
8. Charred wood fragments.
9. Three circular stone dics, two 4" dia, by ¾" thick, one 3" dia by ¾".
10. Horse bones, small fragments mostly badly decayed, but some teeth readily recognizable.

Total height of brick shaft was 12 ft. Walls were of single brick with space enclosed 4½ Sq. ft. Bricks measured 18" x 9½" x 3½". At the depth of 15' there was false floor of bricks. The lower chamber was also paved with bricks. From upper part of the shaft a small snake image of greenish soapstance and some pottery were recovered.

Beneath the false floor was a large spherical pot, 1 ft in diameter containing ashes alongwith several miniature pots, of which 17 were complete.

At Mansar six lingas were found, some still in their original position. One was found at Kindsi and another at Nandapuri. All eight are similar, 5 ft in height with a rounded upper part of 1 to 1½ ft joining directly to a square shaft."
The site (Hidimba Tekdi, Stupa mound and the area in between these two) was declared protected by Shri P.V. Chance, Secretary to the Govt. of India, on 30.6.1935, under Ancient Monument Preservation Act, 1904. After about four decades the chance discovery of a Saiva image identified as that of 'Hrasva-Vamana' in red sand-stone, done in Vakataka style and rock engraved inscriptions in conch-shell character assignable to the 5th Cent. A.D. attracted attention of scholars.

Probable origin of the place name

A stone inscription of Yadav King Ram Chandra written in 13th cent. Nagri lipi was noticed in Lakshman temple at Ramtek by Beglar in 1873-74 (Cunnigham-Archaeological Survey Report Vol. 7, page 112). It reads

समाधिता निकलोजस वहत्यालस्य सा। सुरपिकबदनबोग-समृद्धितवानवाहमनादिवक्ता नृत्राण (नाम)।। कलिपासुरनवट्टु (अ) संगादंकक्किजर्जत (अ) नो। संगं ने गणयंतुआथममुख्य (परा) मुतिदेवता।। नास्वर्मसिसनमणि कालकुड़ तीर्थस्य प्रायय समाधानिष्ठी।"

The मणिकालकुड़ is mentioned while describing the importance of Sindhorigiri (सिंदहोरिगिरि). It is said that after taking bath one has to go for worship of Hidimba. It appears that in due course the मणिकालकुड़ changed into मणिकालकुड़ and then to मणिसर: leading to the present name मनसर. Mansar is known as Hidimba Tirth. When Mansar was visited by Sir Chakradharswami its name was मनसील (सिद्धूर महात्त्व (२, ६))

I. Stone Age Mansar

Apart from the Early historic and historic remains, Mansar and its surroundings with plenty of water, forest wealth and surrounding hills as source of raw materials, mainly sand-stone and embedded quartzite in the veins of granitic rocks, variety of crystalline nodules, attracted Early Man to roam and settle in the region. In this area there are a number of rock-shelters which contain habitation deposits.

While excavating at Mansar, large number of stone tools were collected, from the filling and from the foot-hills. Some tools were also collected from the area where a rough anthropomorphic figure has been installed by Early Man.

1. Early Stone Age

While carrying out probings in the bed of Mansar lake, Dr. S.N. Rajguru found the evidence of a small river that flowed from east to west, most probably joining the nearby Pench river at Naikund. It is now quite clear that around 2nd cent. B.C. this river was harnessed to create the present Mansar tank.

A large number of tools, mostly made on crystalline quartz have been shaped on chunks of blocks of rocks obtained directly from the well-joined rocks exposed on the hills. The system of multi-directional joints in the granitic outcrops has facilitated quarrying. A number of steep sharp core-scrapers and choppers have been shaped out of such rock pieces. The Prehistorian man of Mansar also utilised the pebbles from the stream. Nearly 80% tools are on quartzitic material. Hand-axes, chopper (choppers and chopper-chopping tools), a large number of side and end scrapers are made of quartzitic
material. Commonly flattish discoid cores have been used for unifacially trimmed steep-edged scrapers, while ovoid and elliptical pebble forms have been used for producing a chopper edge by alternate flaking on the circumference.

In the fashioning of these tools controlled flaking technique has been used as indicated by shallow and small sized scars. A large number of tools also show stepped scar beds of careful secondary trimming. The primary flakes invariably have a plain striking platform and wide flaking angle. The cross-section of finished tools are more or less sub-triangular or bi-convex and the implements have mostly symmetrical forms. Tool types and features display typical Acheulian assemblage. The tools collected are those used for hunting and digging up edible roots and tubers, with the later out numbering the former.

A. Hand axes

Apart from some beautiful pea-shaped hand-axes, some unfinished ovoids, having a well-developed alternately flaked chopper edge have been recovered. The quartzitic hand-axes have almond forms and their tongue like working point is achieved by maximum flaking on either face. Mostly, these are made on flakes. Ovates are the dominant type followed by the almond form and are having bi-convex cross-section. Technologically these hand axes belong to Late Acheulian stage.

B. Cleavers

A large number of cleavers were collected made on quartzite pieces. The scar generally forms the cleaver edge by inter-secting plain primary flake surface on the underside. The edge in these tools have been obtained by taking advantage of the inclined cleavage plain of the natural rock. Almost all the cleavers are made on flakes. In the majority of the tools the cutting edge is oblique and convex. Straight cutting edges are few. In most of the tools the cross-section in the middle of the tools are bi-convex and in few trapezoidal.

C. Points

The points consist of unifacial points made on flakes, unifacial single shoulder point on flake, bifacially worked points and miscellaneous points.

D. Picks

On a medium sized block, a flat surface has been produced by bold flaking. The tapering ends of the long axes of the implement are the working ends of the pick with a humped back.

E. Scrapers

Scrapers shaped out of quartzite flakes are found in good number. Many could be classified as core-scrapers also.

F. Choppers

They are both unifacial and bifacial depending on whether the working edge is obtained by unilateral or bilateral flaking.
G. Discoids and Cores

Discoids form a large group including the diminutive discoids which generally occur along with the Middle Stone Age tools. There are also bi-conical discoids.

H. Flakes

Presence of large number of flakes at the site indicates that it was a factory site. They possess a distinct bulb-of-percussion. All the flakes have unifaceted striking platform. None of them show the levelloision type of prepared platform.

2. Middle Stone Age

All tools of this assemblage are smaller than those of Early Stage Age. These are also mostly on quartzite and few on reddish sand stone. The collection comprises of points, borers, scrapers, blades, small sized hand-axes, etc. Flakes usually had an unifaceted striking platform inclined at an angle of 90° or more to the primary flake surface. The manufacturing technique is similar to that of Early Stone Age industry. The fine and delicate touch on the points and scrapers and production of more blade like flakes are clearly visible. Though on technological grounds this industry could be termed as Late Acheulian, due to unspecialized character of the types of implements, they belong to Middle Stone Age.

The pointed tools consist of borers and other varieties of points. The borers are usually made on flakes and rarely on nodules, whereas the points are made exclusively on flakes. The scrapers are made either on flakes or diminutive pebbles or on split pebbles. There are side scrapers as well as convex and concave scrapers, apart from bifacially worked scrapers. Discoids are very limited in number.

3. Late Stone Age

Microliths from Mansar have been made on a variety of crypto-crystalline siliceous materials and on non-crystalline quartz. These minerals have been mostly from the veins in the out-crops of Deccan Trap and Inter-Trappean formation. The tools comprise of cores, points, borers, blades, awls, triangles, trapezes, scrapers, core-scrapers, concave and notched core scrapers, side-scrapers, burins etc. The points on blades constitute the largest number. As all the Microliths have been collected from the surface and filling of the later structural activities, coming to any conclusion about their percentage will be erroneous.

The points are mostly worked unifacially. A few of the crescents and concentric points have been backed by bilateral trimming. In case of blades, the basic types are simple blades and retouched blades.

The over-whelming percentage of tools used for digging roots and tubers, scraping etc. clearly show that Early Man of mansar was primarily depending on vegetarian food, which was available in plenty. He substituted it by hunting animals. In my view this is true for other areas in India also. The faulty notion that Early Man was mostly dependent on hunting of animals and was primarily flesh eater is dispelled, if we examine the functional aspects of these tools thoroughly. In a tropical country like India where plenty of vegetational food is available round the year, Early Man will not be a fool to risk his
life. Instead of hunter-gatherer he was gatherer-hunter. The same is true with today's tribal India.

4. The Palaeolithic God

Man has been worshipping a 'super-natural power' right from the time he acquired the skill to hunt and gather food. First he might have visualised this power in a formless form and slowly imagined his form to be like one of him. This visualization led to worship of an 'ikon'. The Mansar man, to transform his concept of 'Super-Natural Power' selected the same material, 'stone' which he first picked up to make tools. He selected a huge boulder which roughly resembled a human form. On top of Hidimba Tekdi, he installed this roughly triangular shape granite block, after making a notch or two, here and there.

The rough anthropomorphic figure, which is broader at the base and tapering towards top has been installed on a man made platform of huge boulders. This pedestal is 4.50 m in circumference. At a lower level below the pedestal a sort of amphitheater has been created by taking advantage of semi-circular outcrops of rocks. This open space is 7.50 m in length, north-south and 2.70 m wide, east-west. The open area was probably used as a place for assembly on special occasions. The deity has been placed in such a way that behind it the massive outcrop of granitic boulders give the impression of hallow behind the head region. The impressive figure which looks to sprawling flat valley south-wards, measures 3.10 metres in height, 2.10 m in width and 8.40 m in girth at the broadest point. Just below 40 cm wide fore-head a notch has been created to give the shape of nose while below the nose region a second notch makes the mouth. On two sides of the nose, there is a thin horizontal streak of quartz vein, one on each side and these give clearly the impression of shining eyes.

If you stand before the figure and stare at it, you feel that he is about to speak to you. This is not an illusion.

As large number of stone tools right from Early stage Age to Late Stage Age were collected from the amphitheatre area and also from the pedestal area, there is no doubt that this Paleolithic figure was installed by Early Man of Mansar, apparently for worship.

The tradition of selecting huge stone blocks and shaping them into anthropomorphic figures continued during Megalithic Period as object of veneration and worship. The tradition still continues as in India people are still adhering to the customs of their ancestors.

Mansar Paleolithic God is the earliest and first object-of worship by Early Man, in India. The idea and concept has not come to this country from else-where. It is indigenous.

II. Maurya-Sunga Period (300 B.C. to 200 A.D.) (Period I)

Vidarbha was included in the Empire of Ashoka. An evidence to this effect we find in the rock inscription issued by a Dharmamahamatra of Ashoka at Deotek in Chadrapur district of Maharashtra. It was issued in the fourteenth regional year of Ashoka. Dharmamahamatras were appointed by Ashoka in different regions of his Empire to prevent the capture and slaughter or animals. In the excavations in Hidimba Tekdi at
Mansar at the depth of 3.90 m built right-over the bed rock, portion of a brick built stupa having diameter of 8.0 m was located. The size of the bricks is 46x22x7 cm. On the eastern side, a staircase was made on the sloping contour of the original hill. In view of the undulating ground and in order to approach the stupa, the ground was rammed with earth up to a height of 1.55 m and a wall having extent 38 courses was raised. The evidence of fallen debris in a particular fashion indicate that this stupa was destroyed by an earthquake. Immediately after the destruction of stupa I in period I B another stupa was built, this time by creating rectangular boxes which were filled up with small boulders, brick bats and earth. The size of the boxes very from 2.50 x 1.50 m and 2.50 x 1.10 m. In one of these, 34 courses of bricks measuring 42x22x8 cm, were exposed. The base and knob of a lime stone relic casket were recovered from the area of this stupa. After the stupa came into disuse 1.25 m thick cultural deposit accumulated over it.

Apparently these two stupas were constructed during late Maurya and Early Sunga period. Also of this period, on the south-eastern corner of Hidimba Tekdi, a brick built 8 m long (north-south) and 5.50 m wide (east-west) oblong chaitya has been exposed. On its northern side there is a long, 0.80 m wide pedestal for idol, whereas the entry is from the west.

The important antiquities from this period include semi-precious stone and terracotta beads of different types, bangles, iron objects, pestles, millers, grinders, etc. The pottery of this period is micaceous Red Ware, slipped and unslipped Red Ware and large number of Red Polished Ware, particularly spouted vessels and sprinklers, etc. Notable sculptures recovered from this period include, a Trinetra Parvati and a turbaned male head, Siva-Parvati with bull made on rough grained sand stone and schist.

III. Satvahana Period 200 B.C. to 250 A.D. (Period II)

After the downfall of Mauryas, a little later Sugas took control of the territory. From them it went into the hands of Satvahanas. At Mansar from the palace/Mahavihara area plenty of structural remains, pottery, copper and iron object and Satvahanas coin moulds of this period recovered show that Mansar during Satvahanas rule in Vidarbha, became a very important place, virtually the capital or sub-capital. The Satvahanas who are called Andhras in the Puranas, held Vidarbha for four centuries and half from circa B.C. 200 to A.D. 250. Towards the close of the 1st cent. A.D., when ousted from Western Maharashtra, by the Saka Satraps, they found shelter in Vidarbha. In one of the Nasik inscriptions Gautamiputra Satakarni is called Benakatakasvami. Benna is modern Wainganga. Tirodi plate of Vakataka King Pravarasena II records the grant of a village in the Bennakata which must have comprised the territory on both the banks of the Benna.

A huge palace complex with entrance from west was constructed during this period. The palace stood on a solid brick adhishhana measuring 51 m (east-west) and 44 m (north-south). The palace comprised of a large number of big and small rooms, surrounded by a 5 m wide lobby (corridor) between inner and outer main walls of the palace. The palace was approached from west by 3 to 4 flight of wide steps. The adhishhana was raised right over the bed rock. It is made of well baked, fine bricks measuring 44x25x8 cm. Mortar used is very thin almost invisible. Outer walls of the
palace and the adhisthana wall are embellished with pillaster mouldings which were lime plastered with red and white colour alternately. Each niche is 25 cm wide in the depressed area, flanked by 21 cm wide pillars of single bricks, on each side. They are 65 cm in height. At the kapota level it was decorated with brick makara figures at regular intervals. The extent height of adhisthana is 4.10 m.

After the completion of the palace at the time of 'Griha-Pravesh', 'Vastu-Pooja' was performed, the evidence of which has been found in the form of a circular (outer) and a square (inner) hawan-kund on the north-western corner of the palace. The kund was full of ash, from which a terracotta male figure and charred seeds were recovered.

Fortification

The palace was fortified by a massive 1.30 m wide brick fortification wall on all the four sides. The extent height of this wall exposed on the eastern side is 5.0 m. The bricks used are of the size of 44 x 21(22) x 7 cm. Beyond this fortification wall in the east and south there was a moat whereas on north and west it was surrounded by the huge bunded tank. Internally the area encompassed by the fortification wall in 124.0 m (east-west) x 110.00 m (north south).

The area between the fortification wall and adhisthana of the palace is nearly uniformly 30 m in width. All around the adhisthana wall, on four sides a uniform open courtyard measuring 9.30 m in width has been left out. The space is followed by a 2.40 m wide verandah in which the rooms open. The front wall of this verandah is 0.70 m thick. On the eastern side, so far excavated the central room is 3.50x2.35 m, flanked on both sides by larger rooms, measuring 5.70x2.35, followed by two rooms of the size of 10.00x2.35 m, on each side. To the back of these row of rooms is another long 5.80 m wide hall, running throughout. On the outer side of this hall there is 5.50 m wide space in between this hall and the main fortification wall, where a number of rooms of different sizes but having uniform width of 2.75 m were exposed. These row of rooms open in a common corridor measuring 2.20 m in width. Doors of all the rooms are nearly of uniform size i.e. 1.10 m in width. From near the doors, sandstone door sills have been recovered on which the single fly doors used to move.

To the west of this palace a Satvahana period 42 pillar mandapa has been unearthed. Each brick pillar measures 1.30x1.30 m. The distance between two pillars is 2.20 m. This mandapa is 23 m. in length, north-south and 19.50 m in width, east-west. The width of the passage is 3.20 m.

The mandapa is enclosed by a 29x29 m. enclosure wall which is 1.20 m in width.

On the south eastern corner of the mound similar four pillars, of the same dimensions and placed at the same distance, as mentioned above for the western mandapa pillars have been unearthed in the portion so far excavated. This appears to the eastern end of the southern mandapa. Here the stratigraphy is very clear showing three Periods (Satvahana, Vakataka and Mahavihara periods) of structural activities. In this area the Satvahana pillars rest over bedrocks and virgin soil. The Vakataka period wall rests right over the pillars, after the height the pillars was chopped off. Over the Vakataka walls run very hurriedly made Mahavihara period walls. Even the size of bricks, their texture and masonry work indicates the difference. Pillar bricks are of the 42x26x8
cm, suze. In Vakataka period walls bricks measuring 46x24x8 cm have been used whereas the bricks of the walls riding over Vakataka walls are of the size of 36x23x7 cms. The binding material of the last period is very thick where gritty, kankar mixed mortar has been used. The layout of the bricks is also not uniform.

The space between the pillars have been filled up with lateritic red murrum clearly indicating that before occupation of the palace complex, the Vakatakas levelled up the entire area by Murrum filling as this filling is also found in other areas of the complex.

The recovery of tiles are indicative of the fact that both, palace and other residential complexes had tiled roofs.

From the Satavahana period rooms a number of circular coin-dyes (both obverse and reverse) made of fine well levigated and well fired clay, have been recovered. The coin dyes belong to Gautamiputra Satakarni. On the obverse side the dye depicts the Ujjañi symbol, three hills with a flowing river below and legends in second cent. A.D. Brahmi character. Gautamiputra Satkarni, who ousted Sakas from Vdardbha, is known to have issued a large number of potin coins, a hoard of which was found at Tarhala in Akola district. 575 of these were of Gautamiputra.

From this period we have recovered a large number of iron objects which comprise of daggers, spear-heads, arrow-heads, chisels, punches, door jambs, nails of various types and size etc. Other antiquities include bangles (shell & terracotta), beads of semi precious stones and of terracotta, saddle querns, rotary querns, millers, hopscotch ware stone stylus, etc.

The ceramic traditions of earlier period continued with the percentage of Red Polished Ware with different shapes rising high. Few sherds of Black Polished ware akin to N.B.P. have also been recovered. A good number of conical thick walled amphora pieces have been recovered in which Roman wine was being imported. In this period bright red slipped ware was also being profusely used. Of the sculptural fragments, from in front of the palace, from the mandapa area one ek-mukha Langa, a Narshimha image riding on Garuda and an image of Kartikeya riding on peacock, have been recovered. Kartikeya is also known as 'Skanda' or 'Kumar'. In Hidimba Tekdi (MN5-3) from the south-eastern area, near the kunds of Vjpeya Yajna, from the Satavahana levels small figures of Lalja-Gauri, Kuber and Nandi were recovered. All these sculptures are made, unlike the Vakataka period sculptures which have been carved out of fine grained red sand stone; on either rough gained, grey coloured sand stone or on shale type of lime stone, hence are more fragile, though easy to work.

Other remarkable and unique object is the models of finial of temples in different sizes and made of red micaceous baked clay.

**Vakataka Period (275-550 A.D.) Period III**

After the downfall of the Satavahanas around (250 A.D.) the Vakatakas rose to power in Vdardbha. This dynasty was founded by a Brahmana named Vindhyasakti I, who is mentioned in the Puranas as well as in inscription in Cave XVI at Nasik². The Puranas mention Vindhyasakti, of as a ruler of Vidisa.

Vindhyasakti's son Pravarasena I, called Provira (275-335 A.D.) ruled over an extensive part of the Deccan. According to Puranas he had his capital at Purika³ which
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was situated at the foot of the Rksavat or Satpuda. Altekar mentions that Purika is connected with Vidarbha and Asmaka by ancient geographers. The Purika province is mentioned with Vidarbha and Asmaka in the Markandeya Purana.

From the last quarter of third century A.D. to fifth century A.D. the land between the Himalayas and Vindhayas was under the Guptas whereas the major part of south of the Vindhyas, was under Vakatakas. The two great powers, though in the beginning at logger-heads, developed close alliance, particularly during the first quarter of the fifth century A.D. after the marriage of Prabhavati Gupta II to Prthvisen I's son Rudrasena II.

Pravarasena I is known to have performed several Vedic sacrifices including four asvamedhas (here it may be mentioned that the evidence of asvamedhas found from the manganese mine area, to the north of the palace complex may be one of them).

From the early levels of Vakataka period, from the eastern side of the Hidimba Tekdi, evidence of Vajpeya yajna have been exposed, almost intact. According to Satpatha Brahman, Purusamedha, a variety of Soma sacrifice where it involves the slaughter of men as sacrificial victims can be performed by a Brahmana or a ksatriya. The Sat Sr. lays down that it should be performed by a ruler or a Brahmana. The sacrifices including the Purusamedha have been graded from the point of view of the political status obtained by their performance. Thus it has been stated that by performing the Rajasuya, Vajpeya, Asvamedha, Purusamedha and Sarvamedha, Prajapati obtained (won) the status of raja, samrat, svaraj, virat and sarvarat, respectively.

In the Sank. Sr. and Vait. Sr., we get details regarding the preliminary rites which to some extent, resemble these in the case of Asvamedha. First of all, offerings are made to Agnikama (desire), Agnidatr (the giver) and Agni Pathikrt (the pathmaker).1

In order to prepare the area for the yajna the deep boxes of stupa 2 were filled up to the desired height. The evidence clearly shows that the cities were made inside the boxes as there is no interlocking between the walls of boxes and cities.

In one of the boxes on southern side a ‘Kurma citi’ 3.40 x 3.40 m was created by using well fired bricks measuring 44x22x7 cm. The model of a ‘Kurma’ (tortoise) was brought out with the help of triangles and inverted triangles. In the box, to the north of this citi Syenaciti in the form of flying eagle was created. Both the cities face east and are approachable through a wide gate to be climbed with the help of three wide steps. In the centre of the steps a stone has been embedded in the bricks obviously to break coconut or some other offering.

The 2.50x1.80 m Syena citi which has two spread out wings and a beak of eagle houses a 3.0 m tall lime model of a very healthy male human figure in crouching position, resting on its right side and facing to the south. Both the legs are folded with the right

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2. यद्विश्वास्यायुव्य सततम् तस्वातेइ पुल्कपेक
3. Satpath Brahman XIII 6:2:1
4. राजस सामर्थ्यं वा Sat Sr. XIV 6:1.
5. साजस्वेदेवः सर्वस्तो नागाशत... याजपेदेनेत्त नागाधिकि, नागाशत पुल्कपेदेवः स्तोत्राः सर्वशास्त्त्रकि नागाशत... Gop. B.V.B.
leg kept below the left. Maximum length of the figure from head to toe is 2.10 m. whereas maximum width at the buttocks is 0.90 m.

During the ritual the portion above the chest region has been found smashed. Fragments of head region showing severed forehead and wide eyes were recovered from the debris. On the chest region a square Vedi of bricks, measuring 50x50 cm. with an oval hole for fixing a wooden yupa, has been found. In the portion above the waist region a number of horse-shoe shaped, well chiseled bricks, measuring 15x13x16 cm have been laid at different places. These bricks and inner side of the chitis were plastered with lime mortar.

Both the cities have brick flooring plastered with lime. Just below the knee region an earthen pot has been kept, while to the south-east of knee region their lies another pot in red ware. All around the human figure a number of iron objects comprising mostly of different sizes of nails, door jambs, clamps etc. have been found. Just below the left foot, to the south-east of the toe, an iron snake with raised hood looking towards the human figure has been kept on a fragment of a black ware.

On the south-western corner of the figure, model of a 'chakra' decorated with tiny molluscus shells is significant probably denoting 'chakravartin' character of the king who performed the yajna. The human figure wears a flowing kaupina (lion cloth) and anklets in both the legs. On the outerface of the walls of the boxes, in which the two cities were made, triangle designs, a typical vakataka way of construction, were added.

To the south of the Kurma city there is a flight of eight steps made up of rough grained dressed sand stone, having total height of 1.80 m. Each step is 1.60 x 0.30 x 0.28 m in size. Just below the steps in a square Havana Kund measuring 1.0 x 1.0 m triangular bricks have been kept. Filling of the pit comprised of ash and charred globular seeds. To the south of this Havan Kund, a 1.25 x 0.40 m rectangular lime kiln was exposed. Apparently in this Kiln lime for the 'Purusha' model was prepared. To the east of first Havan Kund another square Havan Kund containing ash and charred seeds was exposed. It had two courses of bricks.

Evidences indicate that this Vajpeya Yajna was performed by Pravarasena I, to obtain the status of samrat, as he had already acquired the title of Chakravartin by performing the Asvamedha Yajna. Pravarasena. I was the only samrat amongst the Vakataka rulers. Moreover his capital Purika was situated at the foot of the Rksavat or Satpuda mountains. Nagardhan-Mansar area fits in the geographical location of this place. Mansar is surrounded by the hills of seventh rows of Satpuda, with Hidimba Tekdi occupying the top of the last hill southwards whereas Nagardhan is located just near the foot of the Mansar-Ramtek hills.

Pravarasena I had four sons amongst whom his extensive empire was divided after his death. The eldest was Gautamiputra who predeceased him. Gautamiputra's son Rudrasena I (335-360 A.D.) held the northern part of Vidarba and ruled from Nandivardhana (Nagardhan-Nandapur) near Ramtek in the Nagpur district of Maharastra. He got some portion of Deotek inscription of Asoka's Darmamahamatra chiselled off and had his own record incised in its place. He had powerful support of the king Bhava-naga of the Bharasiva dynasty who ruled at Padmavati near Gwalior.

Bharasiva was the maternal grand father of Rudrasena I. He was a fervent devotee of Mahabhairava. His Deotek inscription records his construction of a Dharmasthana (temple)? Is the temple of Siva discovered at Hidimba Tekdi, Mansar this Dharmasthana?

Rudrasena I, was followed by his son Prithvisena I, who ruled for a long time (360-395 AD) and brought peace and prosperity. During his rule this branch of the Vakatakas became matrimony connected with the illustrious Gupta family of North India. Chandragupta II-Vikramaditya (370-415 AD), in C. A.D. 388 gave his daughter Prabhavatigupta in marriage to Prithvisen’s son Rudrasena II (395-405 AD). Rudrasena II died soon after accession, leaving behind two sons, Diwarkarasena and Damodarsena. As they were minor, Prabhavatigupta ruled as regent for the elder son Dwakarasena for at least fourteen years (405-419 AD). Diwakersena also seems to have died when quite young. Prabhavatigupta’s son Damodarsena, who on accession assumed the name Pravarasena of his illustrious ancestor had a long reign (419-450 AD) and was known for his learning and liberalty. In the six inscriptions of Pravarasena II, he styled himself as Paramamahesvara, who by Siva’s grace carried the lance (sula) instead of the discus (Cakra).

In 1972, a splendid sculpture was found on the Hidimba Tekdi. Earlier Mansar had yielded some stone sculptures that have since disappeared. Out of a set of five Vakataka copper plates, discovered at Mansar, the whereabouts of four of which are unknown, one plate was saved and published by Dr. V.V. Mirashi under the name of Ramtek Plate of Pravarasena II. On contents, style and paleography it points to Pravarasena II as the Commissioner. At present the sculpture found in 1972 adorns the entrance hall of the National Museum in New Delhi. On the basis of attributes, rosary, the skull, the crescent the matted hair etc. this image has been identified by Dr. Sivaramamurthy and Krishna Deva as Hrsva Vaman or Siva-Vaman. The site where the image was found and the sheer quality of the sculpture, both point to royal patronage. Stylistically the image is a trait union between the stocky (Vamana-hrasva) Saiva image of Mandhal and some of the Yaksas/Bodhisattvas of Ajanta and lead to a dating of the image in the second quarter of the fifty century and thus connect it with the Vakataka King Pravarasena II (Hans Baker-the Archaeological Site of Mansar-An Iconological approach to Indian History Exemplified). Epigraphical evidence informs us that during the reign of Pravarasena II, when his residence was still at Nandivardhana, a temple existed that was known as Pravaresvara. It is this temple the remains of which have been discovered by us on the top of Hidimba Tekdi. The discovery of a number of baked clay sealings from just outside the eastern most Siva Shrine on the northern slopes of the hill inscribed ‘Pravaresvarasya in 5th Cent. A.D. box headed Brahmi character, is clinching evidence that the temple exposed was that of Pravaresvara and the Siva image found in 1972 from this place is the idol of the Pravaresvara temple. The deity of the temple complex was evidently named after its founder ‘the Lord of Pravara’ (Pravaresvara) in accordance with common practice and this could have been no one else but Pravarasena II. Bakker remarks “the image combines in an asymmetric but harmonious way two principal though opposing aspects of God viz. Life and death, world-affirming and world-renouncing. This appears, for instance, from the unusual combination of attributes in the four hands, whereas the four arm in themselves are also significant; through standard in Visnu images of the time, they are unusual in images of Siva of the Gupta Vakataka period (Kreisel, 1986,

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162). The god sits in the pose of maharajalilasana, the relaxed, gentle but sovereign pose of a king that is known from the contemporaneous Narasimha image of Ramagiri (and now also discovered from the palace complex area at Mansar in 2003-author). In a way the Siva of this image has become fully domesticated; his wild traits, his weapons, third eye and his ithyphallic mark have purposely been omitted. Each of its corpulent limb is sensitively and subtly modelled so as to highlight the spiritual sovereignty of Lord Siva in the Vamana (Dwarf) form. It is not unlikely that the artist adopted the living portraits of the mighty king Pravarasena II to portray this unusual form of Lord Siva, constituting a unique concept in Indian art, which anticipates by more than three centuries the Deveraja cult of south-east Asian art."

"It is precisely this hybrid character that makes this image and its iconography so unique; it seems to testify to the influence which the Bhagavata environment still held over the Mahesvara faith of king Pravarasena II". In the words of Joanna Williams, this unique figure has no 'Exact parallel in iconography" (Williams, 1983, 227-3).

To the assumption of Hans Bakker that it is not unlikely that the artist adopted the living portrait of the mighty king Pravarasena II to portray this unusual form of Siva", I differ because Rudrasena I's Deotek inscription records his construction of a Dharmasthan (temple) and the king was a fervent devotee of Mahabhairava. There is no doubt that the image of Hrsva vaman or Siva Vaman recovered from the temple ruins was the presiding deity. It is more likely that the temple was built by Rudrasena I when he was ruling from Nandivadhan and Hidimba Tekdi was declared as Pravaresvaradevakulsthan. It is more likely that the deity was named by Rudrasena I, after his illustration grandfather Pravarasena I, who was the only Vakataka samrat and ruled over an extensive part of the Deccan. When Pravarasena II moved his capital to Mansar, Devakulsthanat, he named the capital Pravarapur where the Pravaresvara Mahadeo was already the ruling deity

The Temple with Stone Foundation

In the western side, over the bed rock a temple with stone foundation was built in the early phase of Period IIIA (in the second quarter of 4th century AD). The temple facing east consists of 4.30 m. wide and 8 m. long ardhamandapa followed by anumber of steps. Some of the steps were reused with suitable modifications during the last stupa No. 3 in 6th-7th century AD. To the west of ardhamandapa there is a mandapa measuring 6 m x 5 m. followed by garbhagriha measuring 5 x 5 m. The mandapa and garbhagriha are enclosed by 2 m wide circumbulatory. The thickness of the walls is 1 m where as the thickness of the wall of the mandapa is 0.80 m. The width of the entrance to the garbhagriha is 1.10 m. Inside the garbhagriha there is a brick pedestal 1.80 x 1 m. The floor of the garbhagriha is made of dressed squarish slabs. From below the boxes of stupa No. 3 foundation walls of mandapa and ardhamandapa were exposed. While the foundation wall of the mandapa is of dressed stone of which 4-5 courses are available the foundation of the ardhamandapa and other walls is made of undressed stones of which 3 to 4 courses are available. The superstructure of the temple was made of bricks as the enormous quantity of fallen debris indicate. The temple was embellished with beautiful architectural members and sculptures mostly belonging to Mahabhairava form of Salvite cult. It is likely that this Siva temple was built by Rudrasena I around 340 AD.
Excavations on north-western, western and south-western slopes of the site MNS-3 revealed a sizable temple complex belonging to the main branch of Vakatakas. Stratigraphically and on constructional basis it is evident that the Siva shrines exposed in this complex so far, belong to two phases. Taking advantage of massive retaining walls built of dressed and undressed stones and bricks measuring 46 x 27 x 7 cm, having extant length of 23.50 m and having 5 to 8 courses of bricks built in Period III. A which were apparently raised to make a flat-platform on top of the hill for the construction of the main temple with stone foundations, these shrines were built in phase 2 of Period III.

On the northern side excavations in trenches XC2, XD2, XE2 revealed a number of shrines built over fluted bases with angles making octagons having an extant height of 2 m. Over these five octagons building activity has taken place. At the centre of these octagons a staircase 1.40 m wide was made. It has, apart from the brick Candrasila at the bottom, thirteen steps. From the top of this staircase two narrow staircases, diverging from the main staircase lead to the cave shrine apparently to maintain one way flow of the devotees. In order to close the roof of these two staircases triangles and inverted triangles of bricks have been used in the construction. There are two small shrines (no. 2 & 3) on the right and left each of passage no. 1. The length and width of this passage is 6.0 x 0.65 m and has zig-zag plastered steps. The shrine on the western side (shrine 2) of the passage measures 1.40 x 1.40 m. It has a niche on the wall measuring 0.90 x 0.70 m and a brick paved floor. The extant height of wall is 1.50 m having 22-23 courses of bricks.

On the eastern side of the passage, the shrine (shrine 3) measures 1.40 x 1.40 m having a niche with platform for the linga which is now missing. The passage no. 2 on the eastern side had a shrine (no. 1) measuring 1.40 x 1.40 m with a paved floor having a blocked niche. The size of the niche is 0.90 x 0.70 m. The length of the passage is 6.0 m and width is 0.75 to 0.90 m. It has also zig-zag plastered steps having a width of 0.50 to 0.40 m. At the entrance of cave there is a mandapa measuring 2.70 x 1.35 m. It has a door sill made of bricks measuring 1.10 x 0.20 m. Both the passages meet in the mandapa, of course the western passage after alighting from the western side. The cave has available length of 4 m and maximum width of 4 m. The cave floor is lime plastered and ochre washed. To the west of shrine no. 3 there is another shrine (no. 4) facing west measuring 1.40 x 1.40 m. On the eastern wall there is a pittha for the linga which is missing. This shrine is to be approached by a flight of steps from the western side. Above the octagonal platforms and out side these four shrines, over the two sides of the main stair case, semi circular niches have been created facing north. These were probably meant for installing various deities. From the filling of these shrines, beautifully carved figures of Siva-Parvati, Umamaheshwar and Alinganmurti in red sand stone have been recovered. Stratigraphically and structurally these shrines on the northern side belong to Period III B.

Further digging to the east of the octagons revealed two levels of pitching of huge boulders supported by outcrops of bed rocks to the length of 30 m. The lower pitching has eight available courses of boulders. From eastern side of the first octagon near the semicircular bastion from layer no. 4 consisting of predominantly ashy material a large no of semi-baked sealings in different stages of preparations were recovered. The sealings have, in typical 5th cent. box headed Brahmi characters, inscription "Pravareshvarasya".

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Sri Vatsa and some have elephant motif. The upper pitching has 30-32 courses of boulders. Just about octagon 2, below the brick retaining wall two boxes, the eastern one measuring 2.50x2.20 m and western one measuring 2.40x2.60 m. have been made probably for strengthening the pitching as the filling of the two boxes revealed the debris of brick bats and boulders. It has 46 courses of bricks. To the east of box no. 1 on the higher pitching a semi-circular bastion of boulders measuring 6 m in length and having 23 extant courses of boulders having extent height of 4.80 m was exposed. Just above the bastion a natural cave with brick lined passage and arched entrance was exposed. The cave having natural rock sides and roof is spacious enough to accommodate 25 to 30 persons in sitting posture. In order to stop the seepage of water from the top the roof of the cave has been paved with bricks on the outer side just to the north of the main temple. The width of the entrance is 0.80 m. The cave looks towards the lofty peaks of Satpura in the north.

On the western side the structures comprise of a gateway and a shrine complex. On northern sides of the gateway there is a shrine (no. 5) measuring 1.40x1.40 m. There is a linga in the shrine on a square brick pedestal measuring 0.60x0.60 m. The visible height of the linga is 0.47 m and circumference is 0.35 m. The base of the shrine is of a semi-circular type. The gateway with two semi-circular shaped arms was functional during Period IIIA and directly led to the cave shrine. The two arms of the entrance were provided with projected brick sockets blocking the entrance with wooden rafters, a typical native locking system, used few decades back in our village homes, forts and 'Wadas'. This gate was blocked during Period IIIIB when Pravarasena II constructed the row of Siva shrines, as with the provision of two sets of stair-cases on the northern side the utility of this gateway was over. In front of the gate there is a structural complex having ruins of a ardha-mandapa (5.50x2.0 m), mandapa (6.0x6.0 m) and structures in backside (antarala 1.10x3.30 m) (garbhagriha 2.40x1.80 m). The wall on the back side vary in width from 1.0 to 1.50 m. It appears that structural complex was surrounded by a wall having small pillared niches similar to found in the palace complex. The structural complex was seperated by a passage all around having a width 1.60 m. Apparently the structural complex gives the plan of a temple. Surprisingly the area has not yielded any sculptures.

On the southern side of the arms of the gateway there is a semi-circular structure having a diameter of 2.50 m. This semi-circle has also a shrine (No. 6) measuring 1.25x0.75 m. in dimension, while the linga is missing. By the side of the shrine No. 6 there is a zig-zag stepped passage, 0.65 m. wide and having height of 1.90 m. To the south of this staircase there is another shrine (No. 7) measuring 1.25x1.25 m., the frontage of which rests over a natural outcrop through which three steps have been provided to go upto the shrine. The shrine faces west. Both shrine No. 6 and 7 have niche, one each, on their northern wall facing south. To the south of shrine No. 7 at a slightly lower level there is a replica of Amarnath cave. This shrine No. 8 has a red sand stone linga embayed in a brick pedestal measuring 0.90x0.75 m. The garbha-grtiha measures 1.40x1.40 m. The linga is placed just below a granilic out crop, slightly inclined. The front walls of shrine Nos. 6, 7 and 8 have ben constructed adopting the traingle and inverted triangle technique.

On the southern side in trench No. XE2, XD-1, XC-1, XD-2, XC-2,XA-3 and XC-3, which lies in the steep slope of the southern face of the hill, the area has been excavated
to the depth of 4 m. In an area of 42 m (east-west) there are Sivalayas in three tiers, taking into consideration the lowest one i.e. shrine No. 8 on the southern side. These shrines have been built on semi-circular pillar like bases with unusual structural patterns. In between the two roundels, human face has been created with the help of chiseled bricks. The inner walls of all these shrines have been constructed in a typical triangle and inverted triangle with the lotus petals ultimately closing on the top giving the impression of lotus bud. All the shrines were plastered with lime mortar and had brick flooring. These rows of shrines are approached by three sets of flight of steps. Their number varying according to contour of the working level. The same flight of steps passing in between the common wall of two shrines lead to the third tier of shrine and pedestals. Except for the steps for shrine no. 9 the other two steps after reaching the first tier lead to shrines on the third tier has been constructed in the form of a yonipith with a square brick pedestal measuring 75x0.75 and having a brick pranla towards north. In the centre of the pedestal rests a red sand stone linga with a rounded top. The diameter of the yonipith is 1.40 m. The west looking shrine has an antarala 0.40 wide and a longish mandapa 2.70 m long and 1.20 m wide. This shrine has been constructed abutting the already mentioned long brick retaining wall as between the northern wall of this shrine and the original retaining wall having offsets has no joints. Hence this shrine is and for that matter the entire row of shrines on the southern side including the Havan Kunda and the cave belong to Period IIIIB. Shrine no. 10 which is square measuring 1.40 x 1.40 (internally) has a brick pedestal measuring 0.95 x 0.95 m. In front of the garbhagriha the antarala measures 1 x 0.50 m. On the north eastern corner of the antarala there is a circular Kund for storage of water. In front of shrine 10 is shrine no. 11 which internally measures 1.40 x 1.30 m. In the centre of the shrine there is a brick pedestal admeasuring 0.85 x 0.85 m made out of chiseled bricks. The antarala of this shrine is 0.20 x 0.50 m. The shrine looks towards west. The space between shrine no. 10 and 11 have a common mandapa. Both the shrines are approached by a one metre wide flight of steps which is 2.60 m high. Shrine no. 12 is a Swayambhu temple. In this shrine a huge granite boulder projecting from the northern wall has been framed on three sides with bricks, whereas on the floor in front of the rock-God half hexagon Vedi has been made. Rest of the floor is brick paved. This shrine is approached from both the sides from east and west through the flight of steps meant for shrine 11 and 13. Shrine no. 12 admeasures 2.30 x 2 m (internally). Shrine no 13 is built over a rounded base. Internally it measures 1.45 x 1.35 m. It has a pedestal inside measuring 0.85 x 8.5 m with a carved pranala towards north. A red stone linga is embedded in the centre of the pedestal. The brick paved shrine which faces towards east has an entrance and a narrow antarala admeasuring 0.80 x 0.40 m. Just out side the antarala, in the south eastern corner, these is a quarter circle shaped Jalakunda. In front of the shrine no. 13 is shrine no. 14. It measures (internally) 1.30 x 1.40 m and has a brick pedestal on the eastern side. The linga is missing. Shrine 13 and 14 are approached by a common flight of steps and also share a common mandapa admeasuring 4 m long x 0.60. The northern wall of the mandapa when started collapsing, at a given time, was repaired by creating a human face design. There are steps through the southern wall of shrine 13 leading to these semi-circular pedestals in the third tier. To the west of these semi circular pedestals there are two concave brick pedestals in which and shrine no. 15 and 16 are located. Shrine no. 15 admeasures 70 x 0.80 m with a Sivalinga in the centre. The shrine faces west. To the west of shrine 15 and on top of shrine no. 9 there is another shrine
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facing east which has been numbered a shrine no. 16. Internally it measures 1.40 x 1.25 m and has a brick pedestal on the western side measuring 0.25 x 0.15 m. It has a damaged pranala. Both shrine 15 & 16 have chiseled brick pranala towards north. Over shrine no. 15 & 16 there are stepped brick platforms leading to concave huge pedestals.

On the ground level to the west of central staircase there was a wooden post which was found in a heavily charred condition indicating that some sort of animal sacrifice was being performed as a ritual by tying the animal to the post.

To the south of shrine no. 11 to 13 on the ground level there are square and rectangular brick structures which were created at a very late stage. These structures occupy an area of 45 sqm. having partition walls making four rooms. To the south of shrine 14 on the ground level a square havankund measuring 2.80 x 2.80 m is located and to the east of this havankund there is another bigger havankund having two enclosures. It measure 3 x 3 m. In the centre of it lies granitic out crop, Balipeeth. The second enclosure has eight outlets, two on each side at equi-distance. The first enclosure has a width of 1 m. The second enclosure has a width of 1.15 m. Due to the slope on the southern side below the Balipeeth and Havan Kund a line of boulders running east west has been laid to arrest erosion.

To the east of Balipeeth there is a huge boulder outcrop which has been used for creating man made cave by scooping the earth from inside. The cave is approached by a flight of four brick steps on the western side and the entrance of the cave is lined with bricks making an arch. It is yet to be ascertained as to how deep is the cave. To the north of the Balipeeth a huge brick retaining wall running east west and measuring 8.80 m long and 3.50 m high has been exposed. From the debris on the southern side major quantity of the sculptural remains and Vakataka inscriptions and Red Polished Ware were collected.

Stratigraphically the rows of Siva shrines in north, west and south were added during the time of Pravarasena II, probably after he moved his capital from Nagardhan to Mansar and named the capital as Pravarapur.

Excavations have revealed two major sites of Mahesvara worship in the eastern Vakataka kingdom-Mandhal and Mansar.

The earliest textual reference to linga worship is found in the Grhyaparisistasutras of Baudhayana (3rd-4th century A.D.) and abundant archaeological evidence testify to linga worship all over India from the beginning of the Christian era1. Excavations at Kalibangan, a Harappan site in Rajasthan, have brought to light a clay Siva linga alongwith yoni peeth, thus pushing back the date of linga worship in India to third millennium B.C.

Vakataka kings have repeatedly stated in their inscriptions that their Bharasiva ancestors were favoured by Siva because they wore his emblem, the linga in their shoulders. Rudrasena I is described as atyantasvamimahabhairavabhakta and Rudrasena II (Bhavanaga) is said to belong to a House that was installed by Siva. Pravarasena II had again embraced the Siva faith of his ancestors.

In the eleventh regnal year of Pravarasena II, a resident of the 26th Vataka of Pravaresvara, Suryasvamin, was the recipient of two grants. Inscriptions of Pravarasena II also tell us, that he had decided to build a new residence, Pravarapura, to which his court moved before sixteenth year of his reign. (Shastri, 1992-231). And this fact has now been proved by the discovery of three storeyed well fortified palace with sprawling other residential complexes for the elite of his court to the east of Hidimba Tekdi, generally known as Mahavihara site. With the discovery of a soap stone seal inscribed 'Pravarasya' in 5th cent. AD, box-head Brahmi character (similar to sealings found on Hidimba Takdi) from within the fortification of the palace it is now finally settled that the palace belonged to Pravarasena II and that the place was Pravarapura as Pravarasena II built his new residence in the vicinity of the Pravaresvara temple, which then acquired the status and function of a state sanctuary in Pravarapura, like the Ramagiristhana was the state sanctuary of Nandivardhana. A charter issued from the Pravaresvaradevakulasasthana in Pravarasena II's twenty-ninth regional year seems to imply that the Pravaresvara temple had been granted the status of state sanctuary, Vajpaykadharmasthana, it seems to refer to a royal estate where official function could be performed. Pravarasena II made majority of his land donations from his residential abode Pravarapur. The Pravaresvara temple appears to have possessed lands. This may be inferred from the designation of the 26th village (Vataka) of Pravaresvara.

The temple which faced east, that is towards Ramagiri, was approached from the east by a massive flight of steps made of dressed sand stone and on two sides supported by brick walls having at least 38 extant courses intact. As the steps were built on the sloping contour of the mound in view of the undulating ground and to hold the filling between the temple entrance and steps, a gap of 20 m., on both sides of the steps retaining walls of undressed boulders were raised. The high plinth of the temple was achieved after filling up the area between the foundation walls. The area where Vajpeya Yajna was performed was also filled up with boulders, brick-bats and earth so that the devotees after climbing the steps walk straight up to the entrance of the mandapa of the temple.

Sculptures

From the nature of destruction of Pravaresvara's temple and other shrines it is evident that they were demolished and destroyed by human agency willfully. Inside the debris of the main temple hardly any image or architectural fragments were recovered. The area, the space between the walls were filled up with earth and brickbats. All the images, huge architectural frequebts and fragmentary stone inscriptions, all on rose coloured, fine grained sand stone were recovered from the debris inside the shrines on north, west and southern slopes and mostly belong to Siva faith. The sculptures themselves largely constitute a distinctive school of art of the main branch of the Vakataks marked by refined elegance and expressiveness matching the best products of the contemporary classical Gupta art.

The remarkable pieces of sculptures are that of Lakshmi, Alinganamurti of Siva-Parvati, Siva-Parvati, Siva, Yaksas, Kubera, Vidyadhars, kinnara, Naga, Mahishasuara, ornamental kirtimukas, Bharvahakas etc.

It is interesting to note that the art of Ajanta, actively patronised by the Vakatakas of Vatsagulma Brnach is contemporary to that of Mansar and it is thus not surprising
that the two share some common stylistic features even though their cultic affiliation is different, the former being Buddhist and the latter Saiva. However it is in the depiction of the attendants of divinities and the damigods like Yaksa, Vidyadhara and Kinnara, which are common to all sects that the stylistic affinity is more conspicuous. Thus the Kinnara from Mansar is quite similar to the painted one in Ajanta Cave I, above the famous Padmapani (A Ghosh, Ajanta Murals p. 77) and another winged kinnar painted in Ajanta Cave 17 (A.M. pl. 60). Their affinity lies in the delineation of their bulk and posture and even such detail as the shape of the lute and the way it is held for playing. Again, the heavy coiffure leaning to proper right on Mansar Siva's head is indeed reminiscent of the beautiful coiffure of the sculpture of Yaksa on the upper face of Ajanta Chaitya (A.M. pl1F).

The sculptor of Mansar was equally adept at fashioning well proportioned figures of stender physique. In fact all the higher divinities with the exception of kuber show sensitively attenuated forms best exemplified by the well preserved image of Lakshmi.

The Vakataka Palace Complex

The extent 15 m. high grand palace facing west, towards the lake was a three storeyed complex. Built on a 51 x 44 m. high platform, which was decorated with a series of niches, having 25 cm. wide niche and 21 cm. wide pilasters and above them the wide double niches, the outer one 84 cm. in width and the inner one 58 cm. in width was approached by two sets of 1.70 m. wide flight of steps, at equidistance from the center of the platform on the west. This adhisthana which got heavily damaged was later enlarged by 1.20 m. in width by creating exact replica of the niches on the enlarged external face. The lime plaster of the original wall could easily be seen at the damaged portions. The adhisthan had four bastion like square projections on four corners. They project by 0.70 m.

The external wall of the palace complex also contained the same size of kapotas, makaras on niches as that of the adhisthan and was plastered with lime. From the western side, two sets of 13 flight of steps emerging from an almost square varandhah, decorated on corner with double triangle designs, a typical Vakataka feature, led to top story, which had a series of rooms resting on wooden planks. Almost in the center of the second floor, a square like kund structure was encountered. From the centre of this square structure a square shaft goes right up to the ground floor of the palace. It must have served as a ventilator for the ground and other two floors. Inside the adhisthana the palace measures 43.85 x 29.10 m. The main wall of the palace has narrow and wide, high niches, running almost to the entire height of the wall, probably for decorations. In between the outer and inner wall is the 3.20 m. wide lobby all around. Outside outer wall there is 3.60 m. wide open space. To the east of the waiting room was the grand Darbar Hall. Around the Darbar Hall, on the three sides i.e. north, south and east there were a number of rooms, inter-connected. On the second floor in the center of the rooms, two narrow channels ran for fast flow of wind, to keep the rooms cool.

As already stated earlier, the illustrious King Praversera II shifted his capital from Nandivardhan to Pravarapur between eleventh and 16th regnal year of his rule, around 435 A.D. when his grants were issued from his Devakuls thanam-Pravar pura i.e.
He found the abandoned palace complex and fortifications of Satavahana's handy and occupied the same area. Over the palace adhisthana and ground floor of Satavahana palace, he added further two storeys by making additions and alterations but without changing the basic plan of the whole complex of the palace and its surrounding buildings. This is very clear from the size of bricks (46x24x8 cms and 46x22x7 cms) and not so fine binding as compared to those of the Satavahanas. Width and length of adhisthana was increased by 1-30 m and on the outer face earlier features were copied.

On the western side to the Satavahana period adhisthan, in the centre a 6.25 m wide and 31.00 m. long projection was created by leaving 6.50 m. space on both sides of the adhisthan. This projection obviously sealed the steps of the Satavahana period. So to go up to the first floor of the Vakataka palace two set of steps were made at equidistance of 10.50 m. from the outer corner of the projected platform.

The corner projections are 6.45 m in length in each side having projected by 48 cm. From the first course to kapota level the height of adhisthana is 1-10 m having 15 courses. At the kapota level there is offset inwards measuring 8 cms having 10 courses with height of 0.80 m. It is followed by a course of convex corbelled bricks, than 6 courses including the projected plano-convex (upwards) course 45 cms in height and on top of it there is an upward plano-convex course which is followed by niches. Over the existing ground floor of the Satavahana period Pravarasena II raised two more storys. It is difficult to say whether he reused the ground floor also as it is filled up with debris and it is dangerous to remove it. From the available evidences it is clear that at least on the western side the approach was filled up as the original steps of the Satavahana period were found buried and on top of it, in that square area a platform or varandah was created. This is also supported by the fact that during reoccupation in Vakataka period, instead of one on western side two sets of steps having 13 steps each and measuring 1.70 m in width were created, both leading to the platform on 1st floor and then another two sets of steps leading to the 2nd floor. While both sets of ground floor steps looked towards west, first floor steps looked to north and south each.

The outerface of the palace has alternate recessed and depressed portions, each measuring 1.55 m in width and standing on two pillars measuring 0.60 m. The entire surface of the wall is decorated with a series of niches, 25 cm wide each and 21 cm wide pilasters. Above these are the wide double niches, outer one 84 cms in width whereas inner one 58 cms in width.

The outerface of the adhisthana and palace walls were lime plastered and alternately painted with white and red colour.

Near the north-eastern corner, just abutting the adhisthana wall, a square Hawankund has been exposed. It is full of ash and brick-bats. The ashy deposit yielded charred seeds, which are being examined. It appears that after raising another two storys to the palace, Vastupuja was performed, before occupying the palace.

As the existing brick fortification of Satavahana period got damaged in course of time, retaining walls of undressed boulders were raised to fill up the gaps and also to support the heavily leaning portions. At some places even curtain walls measuring 1.20 m in width were raised.
The plan of the residential complex for the elite and the security personnel engaged for the security of the palace is almost same on three sides i.e. east, north and south of the palace. In fact the original plan of the Satavahana period was retained. Vakatakas raised their structures over the walls and pillars of earlier period. Over the pillars of mandapa running walls were erected after filling the gap between two pillars with lateritic soil. Elsewhere also for filling mainly ‘murram’ has been used.

Post Pravarasena II

Pravarasena II was succeeded by his son Narendrasena in A.D. 456/7 as per inscription at kevala-Narasimha temple, Ramtak, district Nagpur, Maharashtra. Ramtak is only five kms. from Pravarapur (Mansar). The inscription records that the widow of Ghatotkacagupta, returned to her paternal home, erected a temple for the merit of her mother Pravawati Gupta, naming the enshrined deity after her as Pravawatiswamin. This probably refers to the Narasimha temple in which the inscription is found.

Narendrasena was succeeded by his son Prthvisena II (C.A.D. 475). Between A.D. 478-480 Asmaka subdued Eastern Vakatakas. Between A.D/ 479-492 Prthvisena II established his independent rule, professed to be a Vaisnava, returned to the religion of his great-grand-father and grand mother by placing Vakataka Kingship once again under the gracious protection of the lord (Bhagavat). Firstly, that his first charter was issued, after more than thirty five years, from Ramagiri (Ramtek); and secondly the evidence of remains of an east facing temple just infront of the Pravarapur palace unearthed, yielding miniature stone image of Narasimha riding on ‘Garuda’ (Similar to one found at Nagardhan (Nandivardhan)- as reduced copies of large Narasimha images in kevala-Narasimha temple at Ramagiri, point to this fact.

This temple built by Prthvisena II is located 14.0 m west of the palace. It comprises of 1.30 m wide steps with carved side pilasters, 2.80 m. long and 2.10 m. wide ardhamandapa, 1.50 m. wide antarala, followed by 4.10x3.15 m garbha-griha. The garbha-griha is surrounded by 2.50 m (inner) and 2.90 m (outer) corridors, running on three sides. The walls are 0.90 m. thick. The entire structure was lime plastered, as per evidence unearthed.

Apart from the Narasimha image, one eka-mukha-linga and Kartikeya riding on peacock were also recovered from the temple area.

In C.A.D. 493 when Nala king Bhavadatta Varman of Bastar in Chhattisgarh, attacked Prthvisena II, his brother-in-law Vishnukundin king Madavavarman II Janasraya, came to the help of the Vakatakas. After a serious initial set back Nalas were driven away. But before retreating Nalas managed to loot and burn the Pravarapur palace. The testimony to this episode is the heavily burned remains of the palace, charred bricks, leaning walls, burnt wooden poles, beams and enormous amount of ash in all the rooms of the palace. Surprisingly no burning action has been found in the surrounding habitational complex, outside the palace, along the fortification wall. Probably the Nalas never intended to harm others than the king and his family members, as the subordinates would have surrendered meekly.

In order to withstand the Nalas, Prthvisena II probably had to accept a greater presence of the Vishnukundins in his realm. There is abundant evidence that
Madavavarman II or his countrymen stayed in Vidarbha. In the light of the Balaghat plates, it appears that Prthvisen II’s rule did not long after the battle with the Nalas, as in the excavation not much of fresh constructional activity has come to light.

The new masters of Vidarbha, the Vishnukundins did not allow any of Prthvisena II’s descendents to rule. From A.D. 495 to 518 Vishnukundin king Madavavarman Janasraya ruled over Vaktataka kingdom.

Vishnukundin’s rule: Mahavihara Period (Period IV)

After Prthvisena II lost his sovereignty he sought relationship in the south in the dynasty of the Vishnukundins. He arranged the marriage of one of the daughter’s of his house with the son of Maharaja Govindavarman Vikramasraya, Madavavarman II Janasraya. The Tummalagudena plates that contain this information are dated in the year 488 of the Saka Era, i.e. A.D. 566. From Hidimba Tekdi upper levels we have recovered a Vishnukundin copper coin belonging to Mahendravarman II (470-580 A.D.). On the obverse it has a lion to right and on the reverse a ‘vase’ with lamps on either side within a rayed circle.

Govindavarman and his wife, Madavavarman parents were both Buddhists and patronized a vihara in Indrapura.

On top of Hidimba Tekdi, right over the debris of Pravaresvara temple, remains of a Buddhist stupa have been unearthed. The temple, as stated earlier, appears, to have suffered human vandalism. After levelling the area and after increasing the height of the plinth by 2.0 m, converting it into a rectangular platform measuring 18x16 m, 25 rectangular and square boxes of different sizes were created with bricks. The platform has an extant height of 2.20 m. The north-western and south-western corner of the platform upto a height of 1.10 m., were constructed by using dressed sand-stone blocks. Over the platform the Anda of the stupa appears to have been raised. Traces of this ‘Anda’ have not been found.

The size of the bricks used is 32x20x7 cms. and 28x27x7 cms. The dimension of the central box is 2.0x1.8 m. The Stupa was approached from the east for which the already existing stair-case of Pravaseswara temple was re-used by increasing its width and length by 0.60 m by adding eight courses of bricks. In the widened steps structural parts like the red sand stone pedestals with lotus designs, Chandrasila, etc. have been re-used.

Vihara- Outside the Stupa complex, nearly 30.0 m. east of the staircase on a rocky flat surface remains of a monastery have been unearthed. It has two phases of construction. The original hall measuring 12.50x12.50 m. was in the second phase partitioned into nine rooms, 2.20x2.20 m. each, four each on north and south and one on the eastern side. The rooms open into a central 8.0x2.30 m. common lobby. On the western side of these rooms, is the 7.0 m long congregational hall which is approached by steps originaling from the lobby. Bricks used measure 30x22x7 cm.

Mahavihara

After the destruction of the palace, as it was not found practicable to re-erect it, under the influence of the Vishnukundins, the entire complex was converted into a
Mahavihara. As the rooms of the palace were heavily damaged, and on the eastern, southern and northern sides inner walls of the palace were dangerously leaning, hurriedly retaining walls, using the bricks from the debris, were raised. On top floor, on the northern half of the palace and on north-western corner, a number of boxes were created by raising cross-walls. The boxes were filled up with debris. After filling up the rooms on eastern half of the palace and after creating walls and boxes a stupa appears to have been erected, of which only the square option has remained. In the process of giving a sloping contour to the entire area, by filling up with murrum, all the Satvahana and Vakataka period structures were deliberately concealed. This also explains the strange structures i.e. a row of long wide running walls with very little space in between the two rows of walls, on the western side of the palace. The space between the walls were systematically filled, maintaining the natural gradient. Before using the burnt palace area to raise a stupa and a number of monk’s cells around it; huge amount of ash and other habitational debris were cleared and dumped just outside the main fortification wall. Such debris has been found at a number of spots between the fortification wall and the boulder retaining wall on the eastern and southern sides.

From the present ground level the extent height of the remaining portion of Stupa is nearly 12.0 m. It is a three tier complex. First tier has 54 courses of bricks, while second has two boxes each on four sides. Third tier consists of a rectangular (4.70x3.05 m) central chamber over which the ‘Anda’ appears to have been raised. Around this chamber there is a 0.90 m. wide, brick paved pradakshinapath. It has an entrance from the south-western corner which was approached from the west through a flight of steps, created after filling the palace rooms. Size of the bricks used in the main wall of the stupa is 43x23x9 cm. Around the stupa, on the southern, eastern and north-eastern half, utilizing the back walls of the adhisthana, and after demolishing the outer wall of the palace 33 monk’s cells were raised, using the bricks from the collapsed palace. All the cells in south, east and north-east face towards stupa.

The vihara rooms belong to tow phases of construction. The original rooms are 3.30 m x 1.35 m in size. After the fall of the walls of these cells, most likely due to a seismatic shock (Evidence to this effect has been unearthed at the inner entrance gate on the eastern side of fortification wall, where the entire wall has dangerously leaned towards west, indicating the epicentre of the earthquake to be east of Mansar), second set of rooms were raised right over the earlier walls, but after raising the floor level by nearly 0.60 to 0.70 m., by depositing lateritic soil. In the second set, width of the rooms remained same but length was reduced to 2.70 m. while for the first phase of rooms, back wall of adhisthan was used as rear wall. for the second phase rooms another back wall had to be erected. The rooms had single fly doors. They had tiled roof as pieces of tiles have been recovered from the rooms and adjoining area. The corner rooms 11 and 12 are slightly bigger in size. On the eastern side, which has been excavated so far, abutting the back of the main fortification wall, a row of twenty two monk’s cells, all facing west, were created. All the rooms, except two i.e. 12th and 13th from south to north; are 2.70x2.70m in size. The two rooms are 3.80x2.70m in size. The room doors are 1.0 m in width. In front of these rooms a 2.00 m wide verandah runs, in which the rooms open. These cells also belong to two phases like the ones around the palace. Stratigraphically these rooms were constructed during the Mahavihara period, though a few of them belong to Satvahana and Vakataka periods also, which were re-used later
without effecting any changes.

The first phase of Mahavihara flourished only for nearly twenty five years, as Nala king of Bastar, Arthapati Bhattaraka, grand-son of Bhavadattavarman, to take revenge, conquered Pravarapur again. As per evidence unearthed in the excavation, after the ouster of Nalas, most of the cells were re-built. The second phase of construction was hasty using whatever material was handy, indicating weak financial support and leadership.

The note worthy finds of Mahavihara phase are two terracotta fragments in dull black colour, decorated with circular embossed designs, each having a raised hemispherical area in the centre. On one side a Bodhi tree (4.5x3.6 cm) has been embossed. Branches have been shown radiating outwards emerging from a thick circle.

Other significant finds include two boat shaped and one circular copper begging bowls, a lime stone square plaque depicting (in the available part) hemispherical dome of a stupa, topped by an ornamented Chhatri and on the right raised trunk of an elephant holding a beaded rosary.

From the Vakataka levels thick red ware urns kept on the brick-bats rammed reddish floor, inside the rooms have been unearthed. The pottery of late Vakataka and Mahavihara period comprises of rough Red Ware, Micaceous Red Ware, Black Slipped Ware. The shapes are bowls, cups, lids, lamps, high necked Handis etc. Iron objects include nails of different sizes and varieties; door-jambs, hooks, rings, knives, razors etc. Terracotta objects include marbles, hop-scotches, miniature finial designs, and bangles. Copper objects, shell bangles, pestles, grinders, pounders, millers and rotary-querns on sand-stone and granite have also been recovered.

Though, so far, no Buddhist images have been recovered from Mansar obviously due to the fact that the Buddhists were the last to occupy the area and as large scale of plundering of bricks and antiquities took place in later times, those on the top levels are most to suffer. It should not be forgotten that three splendid Buddhist bronzes were found at Nandivardhana (Nagardham) the erstwhile capital of Vakatakas; testifying to the fact that Buddhist Mahayana cult was not restricted exclusively to the Vatsagulmruled region, but was also present in Nandivardhana/Pravarapur ruled area. And this influenced the art of Ajanta. Though the rulers themselves were not Buddhists, they allowed their courtiers, merchants and others to spend part of their earnings for construction and decoration of Buddhist monasteries also. Inscription in Cave XVII at Ajanta points to this fact. Buddhist patrons became connected with the Vakataka court as exemplified by Varahadeva.

It is difficult to say as to for how long the Mahavihara remained active, but one thing is certain that in sixth century A.D. Pravarapura became a great centre of Buddhist learning.

After the entire area of Hidimba Takdi and palace-Mahavihara complex was abandoned, the structures remained desolate, uncared for, suffering the Vagaries of nature and man. As late as upto 1906 lot of structural remains were visible on the surface and were being regularly plundered for bricks. As over the last structural remains there is deposit of debris of collapsed structures with a thin humus top, it is evident that after Stupa and Mahavihara period the area remained unoccupied though occasionally the namads camped around the palace area, for short periods as is evidenced by presence
of hurriedly made some structures using the historical period bricks. Excavation of southern and northern area outside the palace complex is in progress and similar pattern is in east and west in emerging.

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